

"It's time they stop doing things the 'Via Verde' way and start doing things the right way"

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(Washington, DC) – *Continuing a series of speeches the Congressman has delivered on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on the civil and human rights crisis in Puerto Rico, Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) today addressed a proposed natural gas pipeline project that is being pushed by the Governor of Puerto Rico and his party. "The so-called "Via Verde" -- or "Green Way" -- is a 92 mile cross island project that has not received sufficient study or public scrutiny because it is being promoted as a response to an "energy emergency."* Rep. Gutierrez announced he has filed a series of Freedom of Information Act requests for information from all federal agencies that have addressed the project and asked the Army Corps of Engineers to "deny the permit request for the pipeline until experts testify, permits are applied for, community meetings are held, and environmental impact studies are done." The following are the Congressman's remarks, delivered at approximately 10:00 a.m. ET, as prepared for delivery,

REP. GUTIERREZ: Mr. Speaker I rise today to talk once again about Puerto Rico, but this time it's a little different. I rise to note that Governor Luis Fortuño of Puerto Rico has actually said something that I can agree with.

Speaking about a proposed gas pipeline, the Republican Governor said, "We can't continue to depend on fossil fuels. Gasoducto is fossil fuels." He went on to say that "tying us down to natural gas for 30 years would be a grave mistake."

He was referring to the construction of a natural gas pipeline on an island where the beautiful beaches, mountains and rain forests are both irreplaceable natural resources and part of the economic engine that drives tourism -- a gas pipeline that sounds like a dubious proposition.

And I agree.

Mr. Fortuño spoke these words two years ago, as a candidate, criticizing his opponent. Sadly, now that he is safely in office, *Governor* Fortuño has changed his mind.

Now, he enthusiastically supports not just gas pipelines, but a much bigger, more environmentally disruptive and more expensive pipeline.

And how the construction of this gigantic, super-sized pipeline is being handled is another reason I must speak out -- again -- on the civil rights crisis in Puerto Rico.

The ruling party would rather people not notice that Mister Fortuño and Governor Fortuño have opposite positions on gas pipelines.

So they are working hard to move this project forward under the cover of night.

Every day – the ruling party answers this question: If you wanted to undertake a potentially dangerous, economically dubious, environmentally disastrous and extremely unpopular project – how would you go about it?

Here's the ruling party's answer: You circumvent feasibility studies. You avoid environmental impact studies. You ignore the standard permitting and licensing procedures. And you take every step possible to eliminate public hearings and public scrutiny.

But how do you proceed without these necessary safeguards and information?

If you are the government of Puerto Rico, and you want to build a 92 mile natural gas pipeline over the mountains; through forests, lakes and rivers; and across critical groundwater systems in Puerto Rico, you would amend a law designed to deal with natural disasters so you can bypass the normal permitting and public process.

What this ruling party does is declare an "energy emergency."

This government's "energy emergency" allows the pipeline to proceed -- despite warnings from the Sierra Club, the environmental group Casa Pueblo, and even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service.

--- Despite residents' concerns that it will be constructed near schools, churches and residential areas.

--- Despite geologists noting it is near earthquake faults and that there have been 2,500 seismic events in the last 3 years and one felt all over the island just 2 days ago.

The self-declared "energy emergency" also helps hide the fact that you've given a ten

million dollar contract to a pal of the Governor's who has no experience at all in constructing gas pipelines. He does, however, have experience skiing with the governor.

And maybe that's why you run a slick, taxpayer funded PR campaign that renames the project "The Via Verde" -- "the green way."

So, instead of speaking to the huge financial, human and environmental costs -- this Orwellian ad campaign calls a gas pipeline over the mountains and through the woods a "green way."

Like a lot of people, I think it would be better to name it "Green *away*"... a magical cleanser you apply to your forests, rivers and lakes, to make them go away...along with millions of green tax dollars.

Here's an even more honest name for the project: the "wrong way." Because it's wrong to spend the people's money on a project they don't want and hasn't been appropriately studied, as the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* has shown in a series of reports.

Candidate Fortuño was right. Governor Fortuño is wrong.

To shine some light on this matter, I have sent Freedom of Information Act requests to every and all federal agencies that have addressed the pipeline project. I will release the results so that the people know who their government is meeting with, what documents exist, and what studies have been done to show the need for this project.

Furthermore, I have already urged the Army Corps of Engineers to deny the permit request for the pipeline until experts testify, permits are applied for, community meetings are held, and environmental impact studies are done.

Maybe the government can make the case for this project in the light of day. But they

shouldn't be asking for a verdict without presenting their facts to the people first.

It's time they stop doing things the "Via Verde" way and start doing things the right way.

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